DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 275 949 CG 019 481

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TITLE Rape Prevention: Experiential Training for Men.
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of th American College Personnel Association (New Orleans, LA, April 9-12, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Students; *Experiential Learning; Higher Education; Individual Power; *Males; *Prevention; *Rape; Secondary Education; *Workshops

ABSTRACT

This report describes the Rape Prevention Education Project, an experiential program designed to educate men about the myths and facts of rape and to increase their empathic understanding of the rape victim. The four parts of the educational workshops contained in the program are listed: (1) defining rape, explaining the severity of the problem, and countering myths with facts; (2) fostering an empathic understanding of victims by using first-person narratives of rape; (3) developing the man's sense of responsibility to prevent rape; and (4) discussing how men can create a safer community. The results of a preliminary evaluation of the effectiveness of the program is also provided. Data from 24 male college undergraduates who participated in the Rape Prevention Education Program suggest that participants showed a shift in their attitudes toward rape. The paper concludes that more proactive programs which target rapists or potential rapists are needed to help decrease the incidence of rape, and that attention be devoted to the prevention of rape as well as to the treatment of rape victims. (NB)

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Rape Prevention: Experiential Training for Men

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Abstract

Rape is increasingly being recognized as a serious problem in our culture. The number of programs addressing the needs of the rape victim or potential rape victim have increased in recent years. Unfortunately, less attention has been given to developing proactive programs which target the potential or actual perpetrator. This report describes an experiential program designed to educate men about the myths and facts of rape and to increase their empathic understanding of the rape victim. The results of a preliminary evaluation of the effectiveness of the program are also provided.

Rape Prevention: Experiential Training for Men

FBI estimates suggest that one out of every three women will be sexually assaulted at some time in her life. As few as 10% of these rapes will be reported (Amir, 1971). In approximately 49% of all cases the victim is acquainted with the rapist in some way. In 14% of such instances the rapist is a close friend, a relative, or a friend of the family (Amir, 1971). Rape is a crime which cuts across age, as well as ethnic and socioeconomic status. It is increasingly being recognized in our culture as a serious problem which merits the attention of the government, law enforcement officials, mental health professionals, social science researchers, and others in positions of power and control.

Many new programs, including rape crises hot lines and counseling centers and rape awareness task forces, have been developed to extend help to the victim or potential victim of rape. The number of articles addressing the specific problems rape victims may face and how mental health professionals can assist victims in coping with these problems has also increased (Burgess & Holstrom, 1974; Heppner & Heppner, 1977; Silverman, 1977, 1978).

Unfortunately, less attention has been devoted to developing proactive programs which will help prevent rape. Those articles which have explored prevention have often focused on the victim (Mastria & Hasford, 1976) rather than on the perpetrator. While

it is important to address the question of how women can protect themselves it is also of vital importance to develop interventions which target the rapist or potential rapist.

Based on the premise that rape prevention programs will have only limited success as long as they are addressed only to potential victims, the Rape Prevention Education Project (R.P.E.P.) was aimed at teenage and adult men. Men can be presented with the shocking statistics on rape, but until they recognize the responsibility of men for rape and until they are enabled to empathize with some of the fear, pain, and anger resulting from a rape, rape prevention efforts will have limited success. The purpose of this article is to describe the Rape Prevention Education Program and to provide preliminary evaluative information regarding its effectiveness.

Workshop

The Rape Prevention Education Project conducts educational workshops for teenage and adult men. The workshops have four parts: 1) defining rape, explaining the severity of the problem, and countering rape myths with facts and statistics; 2) fostering more empathic understanding of victims by using a first-person narrative of a rape experience; 3) developing in men a sense of responsibility as men and as members of society to help prevent rape; and 4) discussing what men can do to help create a safer community and empowering them to take action.

In part one, myths and facts about rape are reviewed with participants.[1] The format is largely didactic with time for questions. Parts two and three make use of experimental empathy exercises. For part two, the presenter, a man with whom the participants are asked to identify, reads a detailed account of being raped that could be his own experience. The participants are then asked to discuss their reactions to the account. The presenter steers the discussion away from cognitive processes and toward feelings. The point is to make the role-play narrative come alive for the participants, and to make them feel, however briefly, the victim's distress.

In part three, the participants are asked to imagine themselves as the observer of a situation in which their roommate coerces his date into having sex against her will. The intentions are (1) to enable participants to make the cognitive and emotional connections between the sometimes ambiguous "date rape" and violent rape, and (2) to encourage participants to consider the special problem of a rape in which the victim and the perpetrator are acquainted with each other. In part four, participants are encouraged to discuss their responses to the workshop as a whole.

Facilitators also briefly discuss the types of personal or political actions participants may take to help prevent rape. Suggestions for action include: discouraging friends from telling jokes which are violent toward women, crossing the street when

passing a woman walking alone at night, working for or starting a campus escort service, or volunteering for community education work at a rape crisis center. In addition, information and referrals are provided for participants who are struggling as rape survivors or as loved ones of rape victims.

Evaluation

To date, this program has been utilized with a variety of populations including Junior High students, college students, prison inmates, and dormitory residents. Evaluation comments have overall been very positive and have included remarks such as: "I enjoyed the honesty and openness of the workshop, it was very informative and very useful, it made me stop and think about my actual attitudes, good job." Suggestions for future programs included: "have a rape victim come and talk or show a filmed interview of a victim or rapist, talk more about how to deal with and get help for myself or anyone who may be raped in the future, include women in the workshop."

While data has only been collected for one college age population, the results are promising. Subjects were 24 undergraduate males who participated in the Rape Prevention Education Program. Subjects were divided into two groups. Group A filled out an Attitudes Toward Rape Scale, which was developed for this study, prior to and just after participation in the program. Group B filled out the scale only after the program. No

significant differences were indicated between the posttest scores for groups A and B [$t_{(1, 23)} = .97$, $p > .05$], e.g., there seemed to be no pretest sensitization. For Group A subjects posttest scores differed significantly from pretest scores [$t_{(1, 23)} = 5.15$, $p < .05$]. It appears that group members showed a shift in their attitudes toward rape over time. Obviously these results are limited and need to be replicated with a larger sample and more diverse populations. They do lend support, however, to the effectiveness of the program.

Conclusion

Rape is increasingly being recognized as a serious problem in our culture. More proactive programs which target rapists or potential rapists are needed to help decrease the incidence of rape. The Rape Prevention Education Program offers one model for such a program. Preliminary research supports the effectiveness of this program. Further research efforts in this area are greatly needed. It is time to devote as much attention to the prevention of rape as to the treatment of the victim.

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Footnote

[1]For individuals interested in conducting similar workshops a listing of myths and facts about rape, sample rape narratives, an overview of the training procedure for volunteers, and a copy of the Attitudes Toward Rape scale are available from the author.